

Thinking is making: Developing a Studio Space

Dr. Kathy Ring kathy52537879@gmail.com

Early Education Associate

The act of making is as much a cerebral as a physical engagement, indeed the physical and intellectual can be seen as interdependent. For all makers the choice of materials and methods of manufacture are integral to the making process. As can be seen in the pre-schools of Reggio Emilia, choices practitioners make about the provisioning and organizing of materials for their children reflect the shared values of their learning community. These choices reflect their knowledge about, understanding of and sensitivity towards the young child as a thinker and learner.

What kinds of materials are able to offer young children ongoing challenge? This presentation uses images and video, taken from the ongoing action research project 'Creating Studio Spaces in the Early Years', to celebrate the rich interaction of children and intelligent materials and to recognize the gulf in values, thinking and understanding that can exist between 'The Messy Area' and 'The Studio Space'.

What are the key ways that young children learn?

Representing ideas and experiences

'Children deepen their understanding as they recreate experiences or communicate their thinking in many different ways – in role-play or small world play, pictures, movements, models and talk.'

(Learning, Playing and Interacting dcsf, 2009)

The ability to represent indicates that the young child is gaining a more abstract understanding of their world.

It emerges from children:

- exploring actively with all the senses
- discovering relations through direct experience
- manipulating, transforming and combining materials;
- choosing materials, activities and purposes
- acquiring skills with tools and equipment

Why a Studio Space and not a Messy Area?

The names given to areas of a learning space reflect the expectations of adults of what will happen there:

The Messy Area

A space children go to in order to make 'a mess'.

Definitions of a mess:

1) A dirty or untidy state of things or of a place, *synonyms*: disorder, clutter, heap, shambles, litter, tangle, jumble, muddle, mishmash, chaos, confusion, disorganization. 2) A situation that is confused and full of problems.

The Studio Space

A space for shared inquiry. A space children go to where they explore materials and find out about them - what the materials do and what they can do with them.

Definition of a studio: 1) An artist's workroom 2) A room where a painter, potter, sculptor, origamist, woodworker, photographer, or designer works. The word *studio* is derived from the Italian: *studio*, from Latin: *studium*, from *studere*, meaning to study.

The Reggio Inspired Approach: 8 Principles

1. **The image of the child:** all children have potential, construct their own learning, and are capable.
2. **Community and system:** children, family, teachers, parents, and community are interactive and work together.
3. **Interest in environment and beauty:** school and classrooms are beautiful places
4. **Collaboration by teachers:** team, partners, working together, sharing information, sharing in projects.

5. **Time not set by clock:** respect for children's pace, timetable, stay with teachers for several years, and relationships remain constant.
6. **Emergent curriculum/projects:** child-centered, following their interest, returning again and again to add new insights.
7. **Environmental stimulation:** encourages activity, involvement, discovery, and using a variety of media.
8. **Documentation:** observing, recording, thinking and showing children's learning.

Possibility thinking (Craft, Cremin, Burnard)

'Nurturing children's creativity involves close scrutiny of processes of meaning-construction for each learner, recognizing the sheer creative engagement manifest by young learners, as they move beyond the given, or 'what is', to the possible, or to 'what could be'. It involves, in other words, what might be called 'possibility thinking' (Craft, 2007)

N.B. The powerful interwoven nature of creative possibility thinking and creative skills.

What do children learn in the visual arts – to draw, to paint, to shape with clay?

- To observe and become more attentive to their world and their work
- To engage in problems of interest and persist through difficulties
- About expression: how to communicate ideas and feelings; how to interpret ideas in other visual forms e.g. illustrations, paintings, films, advertisements
- To reflect on their work and working process
- To try out new ideas, challenge themselves and embrace learning from mistakes
- To imagine and plan in more complex and effective ways
- "Habits of mind" or ways of thinking in the studio, that extend beyond the making of a specific drawing, sculpture etc.

Studio arts classrooms can foster ways of thinking that characterize the types of learning we want to happen throughout, in all areas of learning

Adapted from Sheridan, 2009.

The characteristics of a Studio Space that support and encourage children's explorations of and thinking about chosen materials (behaving as a researcher)

- It provides adults (and children) who are interested and will listen to their plans, respond to their ideas, and offer assistance and support for their explorations
- It provides adults who recognize they need to explore the materials for themselves and research the language associated with using such materials
- It allows child-initiated choices
- It emphasizes process over product
- It provides enough time, space and access to the materials so children can try out numerous and varied ideas, exploring them in-depth.
- It provides materials capable of transformation (open-ended) and tools that support transformation
- It places an emphasis on inquiry – What will this material do?
- It recognizes that exploring materials includes both scientific and artistic concepts and skills
- It engages children in exploring, creating, and reflecting on their own making experiences
- It documents and presents children's ongoing dialogue and makings.
- It encourages children to share observations and ideas through small and large group discussions
 - Valuing everyone's ideas
 - Emphasizing that they can learn by asking a question
 - Emphasizing that they need to share how and why they know what they know as well as what they know

The Studio Thinking Framework: Eight Studio Habits of Mind (or dispositions)

Non-hierarchical. The habits do not operate and should not be taught in a set sequence. Applicable to all ages.

Develop Craft	<p><u>Technique</u>: Learning to use tools (e.g. viewfinders, brushes), materials (e.g. charcoal, paint). Learning artistic conventions (e.g. perspective, colour mixing).</p> <p><u>Studio practice</u>: Learning to care for tools, materials, and space.</p>
Engage and Persist	Learning to embrace problems of relevance within the art world and/ or of personal importance, to develop focus and other mental states conducive to working and persevering at art tasks.
Envision	Learning to picture mentally what cannot directly be observed and imagine possible next steps in making a piece. (<i>Forming mental images internally and using them to guide actions and solve problems – imagining what is not there.</i>)
Express	Learning to create works that convey an idea, a feeling, or a personal meaning. (<i>Moving beyond technical skill.</i>)
Observe	Learning to attend to visual contexts more closely than ordinary “looking” requires, and thereby to see things that otherwise might not be seen.
Reflect	<p><u>Question & Explain</u>: Learning to think and talk with others about an aspect of one’s work or working process.</p> <p><u>Evaluate</u>: Learning to judge one’s own work and working process and the work of others in relation to standards of the field. (<i>Art-making is non-verbal thinking and verbal thinking, often public and spoken, is a focal activity of arts classes. Pupils engage in reflective self-evaluation. N.B. In contrast to the arts being seen as mainly about expressive craft, teachers talk about decisions, choices, and understanding far more than feelings.</i>)</p>
Stretch and Explore	Learning to reach beyond one’s capabilities, to explore playfully without a pre-conceived plan, and to embrace the opportunity to learn from mistakes and accidents. (<i>Being innovative through exploration – to experiment, to take risks. Let mistakes lead to unexpected discoveries.</i>)
Understand Art World	<p><u>Domain</u>: Learning about art history and current practice.</p> <p><u>Communities</u>: Learning to interact as an artist with other artists (i.e., in classrooms, in local arts organizations, and across the art field) and within the broader society.</p>

Hetland, Winner, Veenema & Sheridan, 2007

